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# Noncore Faculty Members' Roles: Expectations and System Stress

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## **Abstract**

*Schools of education increasingly are using contingent faculty members to instruct students. Contingent faculty members bring expertise and knowledge. However, because they often are less aware of university expectations, their instruction can magnify program weaknesses and overshadow strengths. To strengthen program infrastructure, the roles and expectations of contingent faculty members must be defined clearly and recognized by all school of education faculty members and university administrators.*

The increased use of nontenured, non-permanent faculty members (e.g., adjunct, contingent, or noncore faculty members) in schools of education (SOEs) in American universities (Gappa 2000; American Association of University Professors [AAUP] 2003; Finkelstein 2003) raises questions about how those universities define their educational goals, expertise, and leadership roles. SOEs are complex systems which must align with external systems that require democratic participation by all faculty members, including noncore faculty members, in curriculum development, program implementation, evaluation, coherence, and integrity. The systemic health of this complex institution affects the quality of education offered to preservice and in-service teachers and, ultimately, the education of their K–12 students. Disparity exists among core faculty members, staff members, administrators, students, noncore faculty members, and the professional community regarding the participation of noncore faculty in SOE work.

## **Faculty Types**

Traditionally, there have been three basic faculty types: tenure and tenure-eligible (e.g., core faculty members); contract (e.g., core faculty members such as clinical, research, or visiting faculty); and adjunct (e.g., noncore faculty members hired on a part-time or as-needed basis). These three types differed in the qualifications required

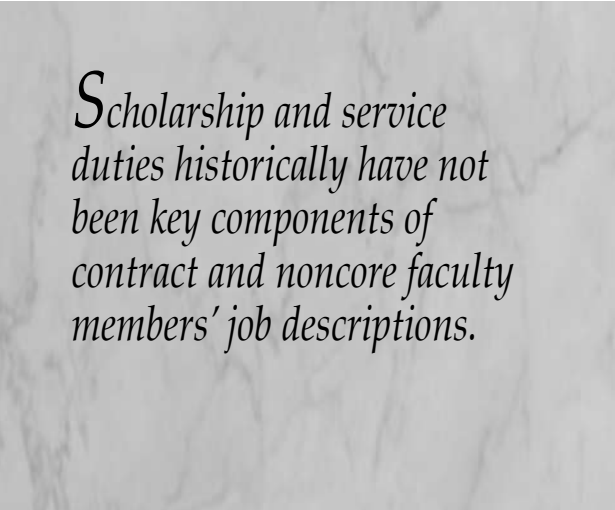
and the professional duties assigned. For example, to achieve tenure, faculty members were required to have a terminal degree, generate scholarly publications, and perform administrative tasks for the field and the institution. Teaching may or may not have been considered a primary duty.

In contrast, scholarship and service duties historically have not been key components of contract and noncore faculty members' job descriptions. Contract and noncore faculty members were hired specifically to teach. Contract faculty members were working professionals who had expertise in a specific field and sometimes contributed to faculty development. Though they often were considered core faculty members and were integrated into departmental governance, they may not have earned a terminal degree. In most instances, noncore faculty members received low pay and had low status. In the most cynical view, noncore faculty members may have been recruited for expediency rather than academic or professional expertise (Gappa 2000).

Recent trends (Mallon 2000; U.S. Department of Education [ED] 2003) suggest a restructuring of hiring practices and a variety of faculty types that defy ready definition. Faculty positions now include the traditional tracks, as well as permanent but tenure-ineligible, full-time contract, limited-term contract, fixed-term contract, part-time, contingent, and quasi-faculty staff positions (e.g., those who administer field placements) (Chronister and Baldwin 1999; Gappa 2000; Mallon 2000; AAUP 2003; Finkelstein 2003). Many conventional teaching-only positions have been renamed and include an expectation of service.

Some colleges and universities no longer offer tenure to their faculty members (Mallon 2000). In those institutions, permanent but tenure-ineligible faculty members are considered core faculty members. In some tenure-granting institutions, faculty members

may be offered long-term or permanent contracts, but are not eligible for tenure. Though they share the roles and responsibilities of core faculty members, they are perceived as second-class citizens in the academic hierarchy (Gappa 2000; Mallon 2000) and manifest what Finkelstein (2003) described as a contingent academic workforce within a restructured academic community.



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Recent work has examined the changes in the types of faculty members at public and private colleges and universities and the forces influencing the increased reliance

on tenure-ineligible faculty (Chait and Trower 1998; Chronister and Baldwin 1999; Aronowitz and Giroux 2000; Mallon 2000; ED 2003; Finkelstein 2003). Other research has

explored faculty members' roles and job satisfaction among tenure eligible and tenure-ineligible faculty members. Though Perry et al. (1997) and Gappa (2000) reported that job satisfaction among core and noncore faculty members was similar, their analysis was based upon the underlying assumption that the role of noncore faculty members was universally understood and agreed upon by core and noncore faculty members and administrators. Evidence, however, suggests that specific job descriptions outlining the roles of noncore faculty members were often absent (Chronister and Baldwin 1999), in flux (Jonas and Weimer 1997; Mello 2003), or poorly defined (Finkelstein 2003).

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### ***Job Expectations***

This increased reliance on non-traditional faculty members, which is occurring in conjunction with redefined hiring practices at colleges and universities (Chronister and Baldwin 1999), suggests that the role of all faculty members has become less clear. Traditional lines between specific job roles and academic responsibilities are blurred. Job retention policies are less stable.

Noncore faculty members' service requirements have been expanded to include attending meetings, reading new policies, contributing ideas, collecting assessment data, revising current curriculum and programs, and designing and implementing new programs. These services traditionally were performed by core faculty members as a condition of tenure or as part of their professional responsibilities. These contributions largely resulted from faculty scholarship and allied activities, such as presentations of scholarly work at conferences, attendance at workshops, and publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Now, however, noncore faculty members, who as a rule do not participate in scholarship activities (Good and Brophy 1986), are expected to participate in a service role without a corresponding change in professional status. Additionally, noncore faculty members are being asked to participate in student evaluation, program assessment, and the collection of artifacts and data for national, state, and local accreditation exercises to ensure continuous improvement of the SOE programs (Mai 2004).

Core faculty members and administrators may hope that noncore faculty members will share their specialized knowledge with the SOE and help influence curricular changes and program expectations (Schön 1983; Mello 2003; Mai 2004). The institution may officially acknowledge noncore faculty members' positive contributions, in part to justify this group's increasing responsibilities in program implementation. Core faculty members may encourage noncore faculty members to participate in governance and

curriculum development, not just for more efficient division of labor, but also for more effective implementation of policies (Edmondson and Fisher 2003). Alternatively, core faculty members may regard noncore instructors as a necessary condition of an underfunded system (AAUP 2003) that would be better served by a full-time instructor.

The formal roles of noncore faculty members are no longer apparent to noncore faculty members themselves nor to their core faculty colleagues or to the overall system. So, the question remains: Are noncore faculty members merely clinical experts, substitute teachers, or bargain-priced service providers? Or, are noncore faculty

members truly part of an academic team that should contribute to the department's development and the trajectory of the institution itself?

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### **System Stress**

SOEs require a large pool of clinical faculty members to fulfill their obligation of preparing students professionally for their teaching careers. This fact, coupled with a shift from offering teachers theoretical knowledge to sharing practical and research-based expertise (Mello 2003), and an increase in the number of practicing teachers returning to school for advanced degrees in

response to state and federal mandates for certification and accreditation (National Council for the Accreditation of Teachers 2002; ED 2002), have given SOEs even more justification to employ nontraditional, noncore faculty members whose expertise resides outside the realm of scholarship. Gappa (2000) reported that nearly half the instructors in SOEs are noncore faculty members.

This increasing reliance on faculty members with limited and often undefined commitments to the university leads to different and often incompatible expectations of the role of all faculty members within SOEs. The instructional delivery of noncore faculty members rests on their own beliefs and definitions and may inadvertently undermine official efforts of the institution. Though noncore faculty members offer specific expertise and clinical experience that help students bridge the intellectual gap between theory and practice, their lack of an explicit connection with the institution—whether self-imposed or university-sanctioned—may belie a full understanding of the values, needs, and institutional expectations of individual courses within SOE programs and the interdependence of those programs. Communications with noncore faculty members may be inconsistent, and the administrative services offered to faculty members generally are less available and less accessible to noncore faculty members. As a result, students in noncore faculty members' classes may suffer a disconnect with the university.

In SOEs, as in other professional schools, noncore faculty members are often career professionals, who are working full-time or have recently retired, and who are not interested in a full-time academic commitment or the day-to-day administrative tasks of full-time faculty members. They are well-respected within their professions and see teaching as a way of enhancing their already well-established professional lives and as a gesture of service to the profession, though not necessarily to the university (Klein, Weisman, and Smith 1996; Gappa 2000; Schneider 2003). Many noncore faculty members prefer a less formal connection to the institution than core faculty members because their professional goals lie elsewhere (Jonas and Weimer 1997; Ellison 2002; Schneider 2003).

As demands have changed and workloads have increased, tensions have escalated among core and noncore faculty members. Though noncore faculty members in professional schools may not feel marginalized, their understanding of their role within the university may not be consistent with the definitions promulgated by core faculty members or others in the university community. For example, at many universities, core faculty members look to and expect noncore faculty members to assume some administrative burdens and implement programmatic changes, while noncore faculty members try to maintain their pristine teaching role. This discord raises questions concerning which noncore faculty members' roles are valued, and whether or not those roles are explicitly identified, shared, and agreed upon by core and noncore faculty members and administrators.

An important difference between core and noncore faculty members is how they obtain, understand, and use information about university and SOE policies, procedures, curricular mandates, and institutional concerns, which are derived from state directives; organizational responses to federal, state, and local initiatives; institutional budgetary concerns; and student evaluations of courses and programs. Noncore faculty members see their role as purveyors of specialized knowledge and, therefore, may place less importance on the specifics of the communication and may be unwilling or unable to integrate this information and knowledge into their classroom presentation. Noncore faculty members may be less concerned with the theoretical implications of policy directives and more interested in practical applications.

Professional demands and lack of access to the SOE via a computer may prevent noncore faculty members from using printed sources of information. They also may perceive that the information presented to them via printed sources is disembodied and meaningless, useless, or irrelevant to their concerns and professional perspectives, even though the information may be relevant for student guidance and an appropriate representation of the university. They rely, instead, on face-to-face communication even though it is less available to them.

The lack of common understanding of the role of noncore faculty members suggests that the academic system itself is precarious. Additional nonteaching support is needed, yet the expectations of service to the department or participation in departmental governance may discourage noncore faculty members, who see these extra responsibilities as burdensome and distracting. University and accrediting organizations' expectations that all faculty members, including noncore instructors, participate in academic administrative

life compounds this problem. Though noncore faculty members may accept that their participation is important, institutional expectations of engagement are neither sufficient nor compelling enough to inspire meaningful involvement beyond attendance at irregular get-togethers. Noncore faculty members' participation also is affected by the scheduling flexibility that SOE administrators strive to maintain to ensure that the pool of adjunct instructors is strong and viable.

Many models exist for the inclusion of noncore faculty members into departmental structures (Johnson, MacGregor, and Watson 2001; Howard and Hintz 2002; Edmondson and Fisher 2003). However, those models all presuppose that noncore faculty members want to participate and have the time to participate at the level deemed by the university, or are interested in maintaining active two-way communication with the SOE.

## **Conclusion**

The changing expectations of all faculty members have created stress in SOE departments. The demographic and logistical realities surrounding noncore faculty members must be reconciled with the democratic ideals of the institutions and their core faculty members.

Even today, Tolstoy's (1875/2001) insights ring true. Though all systems are vulnerable in the same way, all systems require particular solutions that are specific to their contexts. It remains for SOE leadership to analyze the interacting elements and facilitate effective communication and participation, beginning with a close monitoring of all decisions affecting and affected by noncore faculty members.

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